

Washington, DC – Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07), a former 3-star admiral and the highest ranking Veteran to ever serve in Congress, expressed his agreement with the direction of a new Navy investigation this week into abuses of sailors in a Bahrain dog handling unit and whether appropriate action followed the initial inquiry into the matter two years ago. The Congressman had written to the Secretary of the Navy on September 11, requesting information on the case of Joseph Rocha, who, according to documentation obtained by Congressman Sestak, was subject to assault and battery in that unit after questions arose about his sexual orientation. Congressman Sestak had held a meeting earlier this week with the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Gary Roughead, where the CNO said that the Navy was reviewing the issue of accountability following its previous investigation.

“The key issue in this investigation is one of accountability and transparency,” said Congressman Sestak. “I am pleased that the Navy has taken the approach as the CNO spoke about with me that we need to both ensure that the facts of these disturbing incidents and who was responsible were fully discovered, and that the correct follow up measures are implemented, including proper accountability for the abusers and those who chose to quietly stand by.

“It is critical that the Navy, like all other segments of the military and our government, demonstrate to the American people, who they represent and serve, that they hold themselves to the highest standards of accountability. It is most troubling to read that in this case, Navy officials have not been able to say whether anyone was held accountable for the abuses that occurred, and that the officer most responsible was subsequently promoted. I appreciate Admiral Roughead setting a short, but reasonable timeline for the new investigation, and I look forward to following up further on the results.”

As detailed in the Congressman’s letter earlier this month (which follows this release), reports were forwarded to him detailing numerous incidents of documented abuse under the supervision of the Chief Petty Officer responsible for oversight of Mr. Rocha’s unit. Abuse included throwing hard rubber objects at Petty Officer Rocha and pushing him into a dog kennel. However, the Chief Petty Officer was reportedly promoted to the rank of Senior Chief.

Since 2006, Joseph Rocha has developed symptoms of PTSD and was discharged from the Navy under 10 U.S.C. Section.654, commonly referred to as Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. Prior to his time in Bahrain, Petty Officer Rocha had graduated at the top of his military class and served his country honorably as a military police officer, receiving favorable performance evaluations

throughout his career.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, the Congressman was the first Director of Deep Blue, the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the Global War on Terrorism. He served as President Clintons Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Congressman Sestak is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*